

Knocked through houses

Although creating two houses on a plot or subdividing a house into flats requires planning permission, the reverse situation does not. To combine a pair of semi-detached houses into one detached house does not need planning permission. Current planning policies are seeking to maximise densities on land in urban areas and large plots can be difficult to achieve so combining two houses into one can be a solution - although reverting back two dwellings would require permission.

Gates and other boundaries

Walls and fences can radically affect the look and privacy of a house. They generally don't need permission on the boundary, providing they are no more

than two metres high, or one metre when they are adjacent to a road. Within a garden - which could be one inch in from the boundary - it's fine to construct walls or fences up to three metres in height, as long as no more than half the garden is enclosed. So, providing the garden is big enough, you can have a tennis court with three metre high fencing or three metre high screening from neighbours. Remember that where you're simply replacing an existing fence or wall, regardless of its height, permission will not be needed.

Hanging tiles

Outside of conservation areas, permission is not needed to clad, hang tiles or render a house. These can be an effective ways of integrating an extension with an existing property, or transforming a house that has been badly extended in the past.

Basements

Lofts were once considered the essential addition when extending a home, but now it's the turn of the basement to take centre stage. Gone are the perceptions of dark, dingy and cramped rooms, which have been replaced with an understanding of what a basement really offers - a spacious, bright and warm conversion that looks as if it's always been there, rather an 'add-on'.

Basement conversions add extra space and value to a home - that extra "chill out" zone could be a gym, children's playroom, swimming pool or home entertainment centre. In a two-storey property, a basement can provide 50% more space - at a fraction of the cost of moving.

Prices range from £50,000 to £250,000 for a conversion. You should instruct either a reputable basement company to carry out a site investigation. If you're not going to appoint a specialist basement company, at the very least, employ an architect and engineer to look after your interests.

Also, employ a firm that offers an insurance-backed guarantee, rather than just a company one. Let your neighbours know what's going on and have a contingency fund in place. ■

Basement Damp-proofing

No two basements are the same and there are a range of water-proofing solutions suitable for each environment. In general there are two main methods used: membranes and structural waterproofing (or tanking). Membranes allow decoration and floor finishes to be completed almost immediately, without long drying out periods.

BASEMENT HEAVEN

Basements@Withers-Group is one of the UK's leading basement design and building firms. With over 20 years of experience, the Company offers a full design and build basement package - from concept to conclusion. Experts are on hand to advise on every aspect of the architectural and structural process and their work is covered by a 12 year defects insurance-backed guarantee. For further details call 020 8689 6205 or visit www.basements.uk.com ■

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Need more space in your home, where do you look first? You may consider an extension, but that's not always possible.

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